



Within a month of the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, 3-62 ADA deployed first to Uzbekistan and then to Afghanistan to protect Special Forces and 10th Mountain Division soldiers against potential Taliban air strikes.

3-62 ADA Missions in Support of the Global War on Terror

by Major Joel Levesque

The 3-62 ADA “Aim High” Battalion was hard at work conducting mission analysis within 90 minutes of the terrorists’ strikes on the Twin Towers and Pentagon on September 11th 2001. The Twin Towers were in 3-62 ADA’s home state and the battalion’s parent unit, the 10th Mountain Division, was expecting to deploy from Fort Drum in upstate New York into New York City to help with disaster relief. When the New York National Guard began performing the disaster relief mission less than 24 hours later, the 10th Mountain and 3-62 ADA changed focus and began preparing to deploy overseas. In a sense, the air defenders in 3-62 ADA began their support for the Global War on Terror in a dead sprint that has not slowed down to this day.

Within a month of that infamous day in September, soldiers from 3-62 ADA found themselves at Karsi Karnabad (K2), Uzbekistan, preparing to defeat possible Taliban air strikes on the small but determined band of U.S. Special Forces soldiers and TF 1-87 Infantry from the 10th Mountain Division (Light). It was a small contingent of air defenders, less than 30 personnel supporting the small contingent of American soldiers who were to

fire the dramatic opening shots of the Global War on Terror. They had no Avengers – just one Sentinel Radar, a JTIDS 2M terminal to download tracks from AWACS, and five “foot-mounted” Stinger teams who, for the first time in most of their careers, carried live Stinger missiles. For the first couple of weeks that October in 2001, they lived in miserable conditions in a place few had heard of only six weeks before. They slept under shelter halves, ate only MREs, burned their refuse with the low quality fuel the local Uzbeks brought them, and manned their firing positions 24 hours a day. Although they did not know it as they were leaving Fort Drum that first week of October 2001, they were embarking upon an adventure that was to earn these soldiers the right to wear the Meritorious Unit Award (MUA) shortly after their return to the States.

At that time, the possibility of these mountain division air defenders having to meet an air threat did not seem so remote. The Taliban had several dozen Mi-24 Hinds



The first 3-62 ADA contingent deployed to Afghanistan with just one Sentinel Radar and five Stinger teams.

and MiG 21 Fishbeds stationed in Mazar e Sharif, just a 50-minute flight from K2. Additionally, Uzbekistan, like much of that part of Central Asia, had just recently fought a civil war with Islamic fundamentalists sympathetic to the Taliban. There was always the possibility that a supporter of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) would fly a plane into the American camp in a repetition of the World Trade Center and Pentagon strikes. With this possible threat in mind, it was less than a week after their arrival at K2 on October 5th and 6th 2001, that the Sentinel Radar picked up an unknown rotary wing aircraft heading straight towards the American camp. The 3-62 ADA NCO in the host nation tower reported that the Uzbeks could not identify the aircraft. The 5th Special Forces Group Commander gave the authority to load BCU's into gripstocks and to uncage their systems. He did not authorize the 3-62 air defenders to fire – he would give that order if necessary. Within a few minutes, the Uzbeks identified the unknown rotary wing and the 3-62 air defenders were told to stand down. The memory of actually taking firing positions against an incoming air threat, however, did not fade as easily. Many of the soldiers were talking about that night several months later.

Throughout that fall of 2001 and into the early parts of 2002, the mountain air defenders maintained their vigilance in protecting Camp Freedom at K2 from air threats. By February of 2002, it was clear that the Taliban and rogue Uzbek air threat had been destroyed, so the mountain air defenders moved south to Bagram, Afghanistan, to support Task Force (TF) 1-87 in continued operations along the Afghan-Pakistani border. They waited less than 10 days before they were launched into Operation Anaconda, the first major direct ground confrontation of the Global War on Terror between American forces and anti-American forces. In this battle, 3-62 ADA soldiers would show the agility that the Army Chief of Staff (CSA) would later say was a requirement of all soldiers. Air defenders served as battle captains, radio-telephone operators and guards, and manned crew-served weapons on the CH47s. Four ADA soldiers even maintained their post less than 10 feet from Major General "Buster" Hagenbeck (a.k.a "Mountain Six"), commander of all Coalition soldiers, throughout the operation. Using their Air and Missile Defense Workstation (AMDWS), they provided "Mountain Six" with situational awareness of CH-47s carrying hundreds of 10th Mountain and 101st Air Assault soldiers from Bagram to the Shahikot Valley—a distance of 100 miles. This was a critical task for the helicopters used in Operation Anaconda did not have long-haul communications. These key air defense systems – the sentinel radar, JTIDS, and AMDWS – provided the only way to track US helicopters once they had exceeded their FM radio ranges. Needless to say, by the end of this Operation, every leader in the 10th Mountain Division had a great appreciation for the AMDWS and their ADA operators.

Once Operation Anaconda was completed, the 3-62 ADA Platoon that had helped initiate the GWOT in Uzbekistan, and helped expand it to Bagram and into Afghanistan's Shalikit Valley, returned to Fort Drum the 2nd week of April, 2002. Less than a year later in April 2003, however, with memories of Central Asia still fresh in their minds, 3-62 ADA received word that the 10th Mountain would once again support Operation Enduring Freedom starting in July of 2003. Lt. Col. Steve Reed made the decision to support the 10th Mountain Division to the fullest extent of the battalion's ability. By the end of August of 2003, there were 15 Avengers with 33 trained crews, three Sentinel Radars, and four AMDWS in the Afghanistan Area of Operations.

The details of 3-62's involvement in the Global War on Terror over the next nine months are too extensive to recount here. Mountain Air Defenders found themselves and their systems engaged in firefights at 10,000 feet elevation, fighting alongside elite Army Rangers in the mountains of Nuristan along the Afghan-Pakistan Border. They experienced daily rocket attacks at firebases further south along this border at the key Al



3-62 ADA's AMDWS, left, and Sentinel Radars, right, tracked Coalition helicopters once they exceeded FM radio ranges.

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Queda infiltration points in Shkin and Orgun-E. They protected countless convoys with the Avengers' Forward-Looking Infrared Radar Systems (FLIRS) and 50-Caliber M3PS, sometimes having to secure the remains of comrades after terrorists detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that destroyed coalition vehicles and injured soldiers. At Bagram, Kandahar, Khowst, and Jalalabad, they stood long hours on watch and conducted hundreds of patrols, hoping for the chance to meet the threat face to face. Many had this chance and, using their skills and weapons, extracted a toll on the enemy. Whether they met the enemy or not, all made a huge difference to the success of the Global War on Terror, for their mission was not only to destroy Al Qaeda but to deny the terrorists sanctuary and to contribute to political stability in Afghanistan.

Several key 3-62 ADA contributions to Operation Enduring Freedom IV highlight these non-lethal contributions to the Global War on Terror. For example, after the November 2003 bombing of the UN compound in Kandahar Afghanistan, it was 3-62 ADA soldiers who secured the facilities of this critical international organization. Their mere professional presence helped restore calm to the situation. Less than a month later, President Karzai recognized a 3-62 ADA Sentinel Radar section for their support to the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) – the Afghan equivalent to a Constitutional Assembly of 1789. For more than a month in December of 2003, this section had diligently assisted NATO's International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) in enforcing a Restricted Operations Zone (ROZ) around the CLJ location, passing early warning of possible terrorist air threats to Canadian air defenders on the ground. Once again, 3-62 ADA soldiers had proven their versatility, switching on a moments notice from force-protection missions back to a "bread and butter" ADA mission of providing early warning.

Afghanistan was not the only country to see air defense soldiers wearing the crossed swords patch of the 10th Mountain Division. For a nine-month period in 2003 – 2004, 3-62 ADA was the only Air Defense Artillery battalion to be supporting both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom simultaneously. By fall of 2003, with almost half of 3-62 ADA's soldiers deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom IV, one Avenger/Stinger platoon deployed with the 10th Mountain's TF 1-32 Infantry to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, while another managed Army Airspace Command and Control (A2C2) for the 10th Mountain's divisional Air Cavalry troops. These soldiers brought the 3-62 ADA pride to this theatre and continued to highlight the unit's professionalism and versatility. At times they distributed humanitarian assistance products, at other times they guarded key coalition assets or patrolled the streets of Fallujah, Iraq.

Although the Global War on Terror started quickly for 3-62 ADA, events have clearly proven this was going to be a long "fight" for the Army and air defense soldiers. 3-62 ADA's guidions were deployed overseas for over half of the first two years and half years of the Global War on Terror. At the same time, soldiers remaining at Fort Drum had remained poised for contingency operations in support of Operation Noble Eagle and elsewhere. The battalion's secret safes contained dozens of plans that had never materialized, yet had required hours of the commanders' and staffs concentrations. There had been many sacrifices but all members of the battalion would agree they had grown personally and professionally. They had also seen or learned more about parts of the world they had never known existed. Most of all however, they were proud of their unit's contributions to the struggle that had been started by enemies to their way of life in their home state on a beautiful fall morning in September of 2001.